Inside

SPLC Georgia State Office Director ‘There to Listen,’ Forge Bonds

Page 5

Report Examines Georgia’s School-to-Prison Pipeline

Page 8

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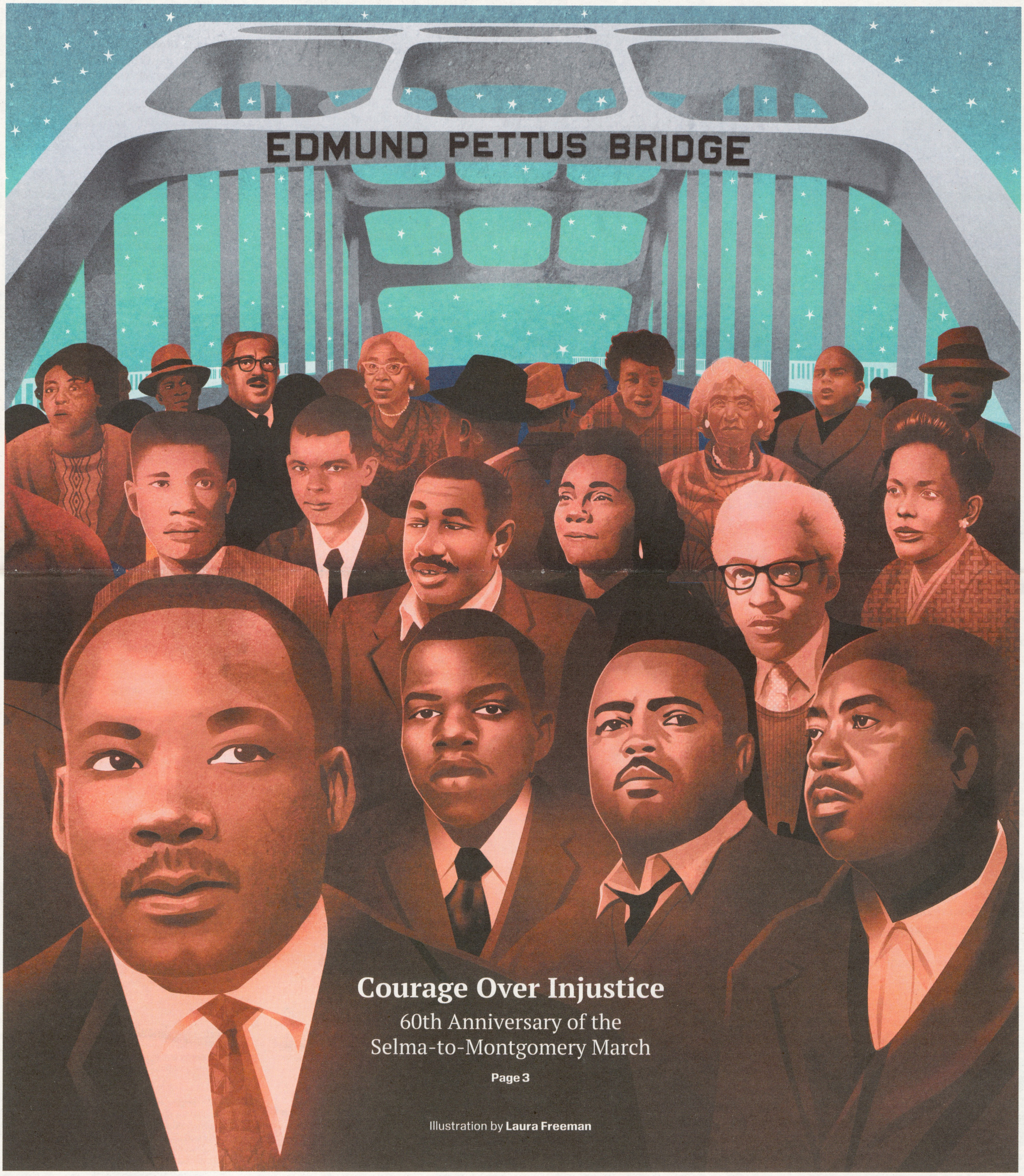

Courage Over Injustice

60th Anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March

Page 3

Illustration by **Laura Freeman**

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Spring 2025 Volume 55 · Issue 1

Mailbox	Page 2
Honorarium	Page 6
Legacy	Page 7
Scroll of Remembrance	Page 7

Guide Links Sex-Based Hate to Radicalization Process

Page 4

Learning for Justice Offers Resources to Resist Hate in Education

Page 8

Welcome Letter

Our Values Offer A Guiding Light

By **Margaret Huang, President & CEO**

For many Americans, 2025 already feels like an inflection point for this nation. Some political leaders face little to no accountability for their actions, leaving many questioning whether the wealthiest and most powerful among us are treated equally under the justice system. Businesses are rolling back their diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility policies and their commitments to social justice, while capitulating to those who believe that "alternative facts" should be placed on a level playing field with the truth. And many of the individuals charged with leading our government agencies simply don't believe in the importance of the work the federal government does to provide opportunity and protections to the most vulnerable.

For those who believe in social justice and in the promise of an inclusive, multiracial democracy, the situation that we are in can feel bleak. But the history of the civil and human rights movement reminds us that the path toward justice is not linear. There are bumps in the road, obstacles to overcome and detours that may set us back. And like those who came before us, we must continue the march forward even when the road ahead is uncertain.

While some elected and business leaders who profess to be champions of equality have already made a rush to compromise, the SPLC stands firm in its values and will not waver on our mission. Now more than ever, the communities that we seek to serve need champions committed to protecting their civil rights and defending them against hate and extremism. We need to push for transformative, forward-thinking policies that can help address the root causes of long-standing challenges, such as poverty and mass incarceration, which hinder the advancement of communities of color throughout the Deep South.

In the run-up to the new year and over the past few months, our legal team has been hard at work preventing abusive sweeps of people experiencing homelessness in Louisiana; securing educational access for children with special needs in Mississippi; confronting a racially gerrymandered Georgia school district; restoring accurate history books to shelves in Florida; and defending against the criminalization of pregnancy in Alabama. And in 2025 and beyond, we will continue to use policy advocacy to help make the social and political landscape of the Deep South more just, fair and equitable.

Litigation and advocacy remain vital to the pursuit of justice for those pushed to the margins. However, we must also continue to organize with community groups and grassroots organizations to effectively advocate for policies that deliver economic justice. Many of this administration's proposals related to tariffs, mass deportations and tax cuts for the wealthy threaten the social safety net, with potentially devastating consequences for those experiencing financial insecurity. Therefore, cultivating strong bipartisan relationships with state legislators and local leaders will be crucial for winning policies that provide resources and relief to vulnerable communities.

The path ahead will be challenging. But as we reflect on the 60th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March, we're reminded that this path has never been easy. The foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement risked their lives for the right to participate in our democracy. We must continue to honor their legacy by using our voices and our votes to bring about lasting change in the Deep South and beyond. ●

Now more than ever, the communities that we seek to serve need champions committed to protecting their civil rights and defending them against hate and extremism.

Mailbox

Helena, Montana
Proud to be a supporter of the Southern Poverty Law Center! Thank you for taking a stand and leading the way! — R.R.

San Antonio, Texas
Thank you for providing critical information! An informed public is instrumental to the best interests of our nation. — T.R.

Alameda, California
May you have the wisdom to ensure everyone can live with enough food, housing, health care, education, freedom of belief, freedom of movement, meaningful work, and freedom from fear and hate. There is no "other." — C.K.

Charlottesville, Virginia
I value and appreciate your work and the incredible strength and determination you all exhibit in the face of very challenging circumstances. Thanks for all you do! — D.B.

Boyce, Virginia
At this unparalleled time of peril for our nation, all decent and rational citizens must unite! Together, we will overcome. — P.H.

Cleveland, Ohio
Thank you for having the integrity to stand up, be aware and be unafraid of offending those whose intentions are specious and harmful. Praying for you. — A.M.

Weaverville, Virginia
Please help me understand the difference between your mission and that of the ACLU or NAACP. — R.T.

Editor's note: The SPLC is a nonprofit legal advocacy organization based in Montgomery, Alabama, specializing in both civil rights and public interest litigation. It is known for taking legal action against white supremacy structures and groups and developing practical anti-bias education resources for community leaders. The SPLC focuses on racial justice in the five Deep South states. The ACLU, the SPLC and the NAACP often partner in racial advancement efforts.

On the Cover

Front row from left: Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Hosea Williams and Ralph Abernathy

Middle row from left: Medgar Evers, Julian Bond, Albert Turner, Coretta Scott King, Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker

Back from left: Fannie Lou Hammer, Thurgood Marshall, Septima Clark, Marie Foster, Amelia Boynton Robinson, Andrew Young

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Brad Bennett

Editorial Services Managing Editor
Jamie Kizzire

Executive Editor
Dwayne Fatherree

Managing Editor
Christine Harrison

Staff Writers
Safiya Charles, Rachel Janik, Lindsey Shelton, Rhonda Sonnenberg

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Chris Heller, Eric Moya

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Courage Over Injustice

60th Anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March

By **Christine Harrison**

Temperatures hovered just above freezing the morning of March 21, 1965, when voting rights marchers gathered in Selma, Alabama, for a third attempt to reach the statehouse. Thousands would eventually travel 54 miles on foot to the Capitol building in Montgomery and deliver a petition demanding free and fair elections.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade racial discrimination in voting, but Southern officials continued their discrimination and oppression toward Black Alabamians. Only a handful of Black residents in the area were allowed to register in the previous year. In February 1965, segregationists attacked peaceful demonstrators in nearby Marion. Soon after, a state trooper shot and killed Jimmie Lee Jackson, a young activist from the area.

After Jackson's murder, locals, along with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, began planning the march.

The first attempt to leave downtown Selma and cross the Alabama River to the east of the city ended in violence; March 7 is known today as "Bloody Sunday." On that day, voting rights activists, including a young John Lewis, were severely beaten by an all-white group of state troopers and sheriff's deputies.

Two days later, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led a symbolic march so activists could kneel and pray in the exact spot where state troopers had attacked them before they turned back.

At the culmination of the protest on March 25, King, who had received the Nobel Peace Prize the year before, told the crowd, "There are no broad highways that lead us easily and inevitably to quick solutions. But we must keep going."

The SPLC is fighting back through direct action, litigation, public education and coalition advocacy to expand access to the ballot and fortify communities against racial and economic injustice.

Today, activists around the globe draw inspiration from their sacrifice, courage and determination 60 years ago. Their efforts led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which protected ballot access for all Americans.

The activists who ushered our justice movement forward were everyday citizens with the courage to act. Many original marchers and their families commemorate these events annually by gathering in Selma to conduct nonviolence training sessions, voter registration drives and various church meetings. The Southern Poverty Law Center has become a visible presence during these sessions, honoring the sacrifices of those who came before and safeguarding the future for people today.

Unfortunately, the right to vote in a diverse democracy is under threat once again.

The March Continues

The SPLC's efforts are essential during any administration. This work is especially critical today because preserving democracy and advancing racial justice requires action at every level, from grassroots organizing to the highest courts. The likelihood of Project 2025 — a blueprint to radically reshape the federal government, guiding the new administration's priorities — also underscores the importance of such work.

The SPLC has launched its "Together We Fight" campaign to champion human rights for all. Key elements include litigating against racist policies and executive orders, advocating for progressive laws and organizing in Southern communities of color to build a stronger racial justice movement.

Voting is vital in the fight for equal rights and racial justice in the South.

The ongoing struggle includes ensuring ballot access and securing a complete and accurate census count, which affects federal funding. Given that most of our nation's immigrant population lives in this region, efforts to exclude residents who are not citizens from the census count would create inequitable political representation for communities of color. Additionally, protecting the integrity of democratic elections means resisting voter laws designed to limit the political power of Black and Brown citizens.

The SPLC is prepared to fight back through direct action, litigation, public education and coalition advocacy to expand access to the ballot and fortify communities against racial and economic injustice.

Safeguarding policies and programs that ensure the health and well-being of all communities is central to the SPLC's mission. Overall, the organization is more than ready to advance its racial and social justice agenda during the current administration, combat the injustices plaguing the Deep South and champion human rights for all.

Together, we uphold the movement. ●

SPLC Staff

Top: Participants in the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965.

Left: Vice President Kamala Harris led supporters and staff of the SPLC — along with thousands of others — during the ceremonial crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma during the 2024 Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee.

Help Fight Hate

Friends of the Center power the fight against hate and extremism. Join them today by starting a monthly donation.

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Scan the code or join online at
splcenter.org/friends-center

Guide Links Sex-Based Hate to Radicalization Process

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From **Staff Reports**

The Southern Poverty Law Center and American University's Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab (PERIL) continued their work to fight the radicalization of youth online with the release of a third guide on youth radicalization, *Not Just a Joke: Understanding & Preventing Gender- & Sexuality-Based Bigotry*.

The guide examines how public school bans and legislation severely restricting reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights have led to an increase in radicalization of people under 18. Videos, memes and other online content are often downplayed as harmless satirical entertainment, but this content serves as a central tool in radicalizing youth and normalizing hate. The guide, released in December, is part of the SPLC and PERIL's broader public health approach to preventing violence and harm from extremism, manipulative disinformation and dehumanizing rhetoric.

"Young people — especially young men and boys — are exposed to online media that fosters anti-feminine and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments that negatively affects the lives of others and themselves," said Aaron Flanagan, deputy director of prevention and partnerships for the SPLC's Intelligence Project. "What we do and say online and offline have real-life implications that we can no longer ignore and brush to the side."

The guide is a resource for caregivers who surround and support young people — parents and relatives, teachers and educators, counselors and therapists, coaches and youth mentors — and more. It includes an overview and introduction to concepts, trends and risks related to gender-based bigotry alongside the tools to build resilience and awareness, along with ways to intervene. It provides strategies and resources to support survivors and targeted individuals and communities. While it doesn't cover every harm young people will encounter related to gender-based bigotry, it aims to encompass as wide a breadth as possible.

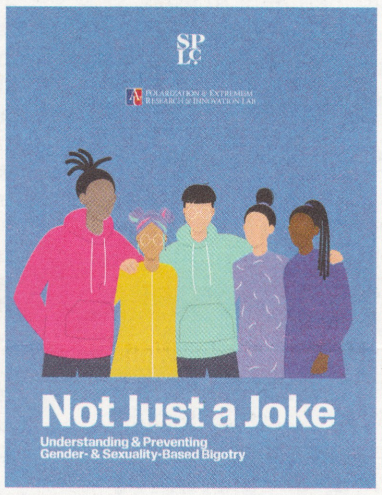
As with previous collaborative work from PERIL and the SPLC, this resource gives parents, teachers and others insights on what causes the increase in hateful language in online spaces, the classroom, at home and other environments such as short-form videos.

This latest chapter identifies six pathways and vulnerabilities to radicalization, along with ways to identify warning signs. It defines terms and ideologies, such as male supremacy and the manosphere, as well as updating the state of anti-trans legislation, anti-abortion and other movements to draw parallels between online activity and their real-world consequences.

"It's time to help boys and young men adapt to evolving gender roles," said Pasha Dashtgard, director of research for PERIL. "Parents, teachers and youth mentors must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide boys through the ever-shifting terrain of masculinity and sexuality."

According to the guide, adults in a young person's network of care have a unique opportunity to offer communication and support to help build resilience against manipulation by extremist narratives. As part of the latest offering, researchers who monitor extremist activity, and experts who specialize in preventing them, have created a model to identify and combat subtle forces at work in the modern media environment.

"This guide serves as a counter to the ongoing influence of male supremacy and to the figures peddling disinformation both on and offline," said Lydia Bates, senior program manager, partnerships, for the SPLC's Intelligence Project. "The solutions provided help young boys and men build resilience against male supremacist and anti-LGBTQ+ manipulation to make society a safer place for all." ●



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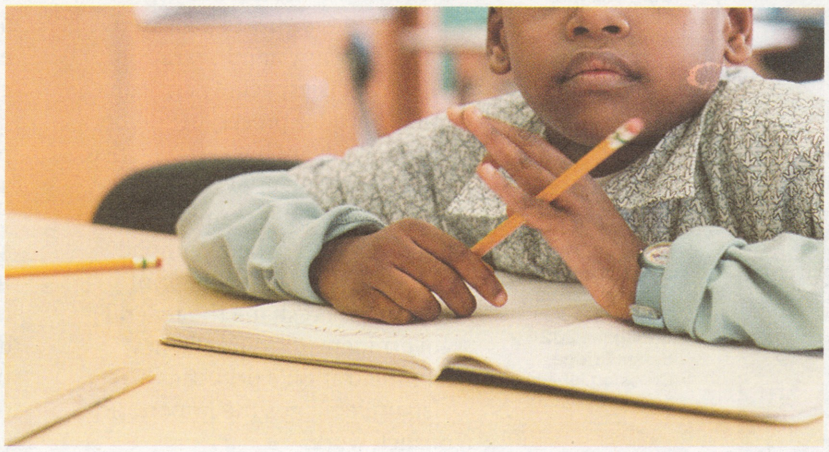
Suit Filed Over Involuntary Psychiatric Examination of Children in Florida

From **Staff Reports**



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Since 2021, the number of child Baker Act cases in Florida has started to decline after over two decades of rising rates.

For decades, children in Florida had been subject to psychiatric examinations and involuntary inpatient treatment under the Florida Mental Health Act, also known as the Baker Act, growing at a rate that exceeds the state's population growth and mental health diagnoses.

That trend started to change in 2022, after the Southern Poverty Law Center published its first report on the excessive use of the legislation and the fear that it was being applied inordinately against children of disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

But Florida still uses involuntary examination in juvenile cases far more than other states, which led to the SPLC and Florida Health Justice Project filing a lawsuit in December on behalf of Disability Rights Florida against the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). It claims DCF failed to follow Florida law requiring that it collect and publish specific data about the use of involuntary psychiatric examination under the Baker Act.

"Its failure to do so interferes with Disability Rights Florida's responsibility to protect and advocate for individuals subject to involuntary psychiatric examination," said Sam Boyd, an SPLC senior supervising attorney.

The suit seeks to compel DCF to collect and publish the data the statute requires, including how long patients stay in receiving facilities and whether some categories of patients, such as children in the foster care system, stay for longer or pay more than others with private insurance. The data can determine if the Baker Act is only being used on those who truly need it and whether it is disproportionately harming vulnerable groups.

"Being able to track the amount of Medicaid dollars allocated to inpatient treatment as opposed to that in the community is critical to Disability Rights Florida's mission to advocate for its constituents to receive needed mental health care in the least restrictive settings possible," said Katy DeBriere, Florida Health Justice Project legal director.

In 2021, the SPLC published *Costly and Cruel: How Misuse of the Baker Act Harms 37,000 Florida Children Each Year*. Since then, the child Baker Act rates have begun to drop statewide after more than 20 years of increasing rates.

"Involuntary psychiatric examination and hospitalization is a massive infringement on one's rights," said Caitlyn Clibbon, Disability Rights Florida's director of community and health services. "The data we seek, and that the Legislature has required DCF to collect and report, is necessary to our work monitoring the use of the Baker Act." ●

Ricardo Ramirez

The SPLC filed the lawsuit after Gov. Ron DeSantis removed Florida State Attorney Monique Worrell from office in 2023.

State attorney suspension case dismissed

In November, a federal judge in Florida dismissed a Southern Poverty Law Center lawsuit challenging Gov. Ron DeSantis' suspension of Monique Worrell, a Florida state attorney. The dismissal came after Worrell's reelection. At the time of her suspension in August 2023, Worrell was the only Black female state attorney in Florida. The lawsuit sought to restore her to office, arguing that her suspension violated voters' fundamental constitutional rights under the First and 14th amendments. Worrell was sworn back into office in January.

Complaints filed on behalf of student

The Southern Poverty Law Center sued Georgia's Walton County School District after it expelled a Black middle school student who has a disability. The school expelled him after he was asked by a white student to hand a vape pen to another white student. The white students were not expelled. The district referred the Black student to juvenile court and sent him to an online alternative school program, denying him necessary services and supports. In a separate state investigation filed by the SPLC in July, the Georgia Department of Education found the district in violation of every issue alleged, yet the student still experienced retribution by the district.

SPLC, partners seek to prevent unconstitutional sweeps

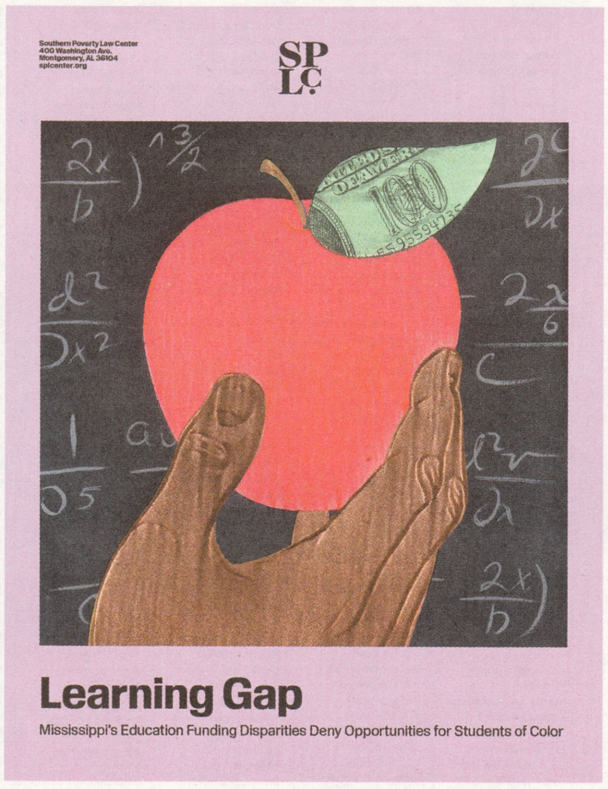
In December, the Orleans Parish Civil District Court delivered a win to New Orleans' unhoused community, granting an injunction preventing Louisiana from unlawfully removing, evicting or displacing — also known as "sweeping" — encampments. The order was overturned by the Louisiana Supreme Court on narrow grounds that it referenced a city ordinance that could not limit state police power. The Southern Poverty Law Center and partners requested another temporary restraining order on Jan. 17 as Gov. Jeff Landry announced new sweeps and relocated unhoused individuals to a warehouse before the Super Bowl in February.

Mississippi School Funding Disparities Deny Opportunities for Students of Color

From **Staff Reports**

The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Southern Education Foundation released an eye-opening report in December examining the correlations between funding of Mississippi schools and student outcomes as well as other systemic issues of poverty and racial injustice across the state's education system.

Learning Gap: Mississippi's Education Funding Disparities Deny Opportunities for Students of Color provides empirical evidence supporting the correlation between school funding and educational outcomes. It highlights how Mississippi's average per-pupil spending is well below the national average and has been underfunded for the past decade, with the brunt of the educational deficits primarily affecting the Black and Brown children in the state. The report also notes the exacerbating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational disparities in Mississippi despite increased federal funding.



The report offers recommendations for legal and regulatory reforms on the federal level. Report recommendations also include ways to empower educational advocates as well as Black and Brown children and families to address the inequities in the school funding system.

"The Mississippi education system is one that is rooted in oppression," said Julian Miller, SPLC senior supervising attorney. "The disparities in educational outcomes for the students are overwhelmingly due to funding that the state has not provided. This unwillingness to invest in education not only disproportionately affects Black and Brown children in the state, it also makes them more susceptible to the school-to-prison pipeline, due to archaic policies and practices that favor incarceration over education."

Mississippi ranks 46th in the country for per-pupil funding levels, at more than $4,000 below the national average. Racial and ethnic disparities in the state are stark. Forty-five percent of Black children in Mississippi live in poverty, compared to 13% of white children. The state is also home to three of the 50 most segregating school district borders in the nation.

The Southern Poverty Law Center challenged the Florida governor's suspension of Monique Worrell as a state prosecutor.

Read the full report online by scanning the QR code.

The report notes that the state is legally required to fund the difference between what the district provides and the total per-student cost. However, every school district in Mississippi was funded at less than the amount required by state law in fiscal year 2023. This illegal funding shortfall ranges from $100,000 to $200,000 for several small charter school districts up to more than $20 million for DeSoto County, Mississippi's largest district.

While the Mississippi Legislature has tried to update the funding formula to increase school funding, it is unclear whether it will be nearly enough to address the additional educational deficits that Black and Brown children in Mississippi have endured due to the school funding crisis.

Only four out of the 43 school districts with "A" ratings by the Mississippi Department of Education have a majority-Black student population, while all 11 school districts with "D" and "F" ratings have a majority-Black student population, according to the report.

The disparity in math proficiency as measured by the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program is also stark, the report finds. For example, math proficiency is 7.2% in the Humphreys County School District, where Black students make up more than three-quarters of the student population. Meanwhile, math proficiency is at 75% in the Union County School District, where white students are more than three-quarters of the student population. ●

SPLC Georgia State Office Director 'There to Listen,' Forge Bonds

From **Esther Schrader**

The town of Sandersville sits near the center of Georgia, its rolling hills home to vast ancient deposits of the soft, white powder called kaolin. It is also the hometown of another local find — Yterenickia Bell, who in May launched the new Georgia state office of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"My grandma told me that if I saw injustice or felt like something was wrong, then I should use my voice and say something," said Bell, 35. "She told me, you got one mouth and two ears for a reason. Listen to people, hear people, be passionate about people."

SPLC President and CEO Margaret Huang said Bell will play a key role in the organization's grassroots efforts in the state.

"We're still fighting white supremacy and systems and structures that are unequal and discriminatory," Huang said. "But the ways that we need to fight and the people who need to lead are a younger generation. The leaders of our state offices are exemplars of that younger generation, very much at the forefront of redefining the Civil Rights Movement and bringing it into the future."

The Georgia office will be based in Atlanta's Westside, but its dozen-plus organizers will work across the Black Belt on issues that affect not only Black Americans but members of other racial groups, religions and gender and sexual orientations.

Like her counterparts who have taken the helm at new state offices in Alabama and Mississippi over the past three years, Bell's mission is to learn from and stand alongside local leaders and to bring the skills and resources of the SPLC to help them realize the hopes of their communities.

"Listen to people, hear people, be passionate about people."

Yterenickia Bell, SPLC Georgia State Office Director

"We're there to listen, not to tell people, 'Hey, this is what we're hearing. This is what we think you should be doing.' No, we're listening to you, and then we're figuring out, how do we come back as a team to say, this is what these folks need," Bell said. "How do we support them in getting it done?"

Previously, Bell served at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, where she worked to promote voting rights across 11 states. She was also a volunteer for AmeriCorps at a school in Brooklyn and has held key roles with Planned Parenthood Southeast, and the National Domestic Workers Alliance/Care in Action. ●

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From Oct. 1, 2024, through Dec. 31, 2024

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Connie Aikman
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Olivia Bird
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Chris Blethen
Peter Bloch
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Val Hunt
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Helen Scott Hunter
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Graham Kerr
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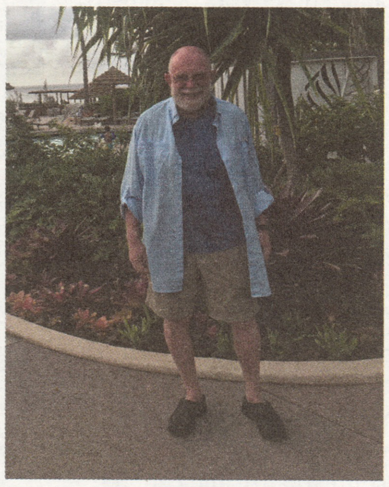
Marc Henley

Building Liberty One Square at a Time



Courtesy of the Henley family

The Southern Poverty Law Center is honored to be among the people and missions that Marc Henley cared about. We will carry his legacy of education and equity into the future.

Marc Henley, a California-born psychologist and professor who spent most of his career in Philadelphia, knew what he wanted in retirement: warmer weather.

When he and his partner Carol Solon chose Savannah, Georgia, as their new home in 2019, Marc brought a love of diverse, vibrant culture with him.

"He was so quick-witted," Carol said. "His energy was incredible, just good humor and deep, deep care for people."

Though Marc passed in November, his legacy for social justice in the "Hostess City" will benefit many generations. He volunteered with several organizations, including the Congregation Mickve Israel and the Center for Jubilee, Reconciliation and Healing's Coalition to Rename Calhoun Square.

This coalition partnered with the Southern Poverty Law Center to advocate for renaming Calhoun Square, one of 22 Spanish-moss-drenched public squares that give form to the city's distinctive riverfront neighborhoods.

It was named in 1851 to honor John C. Calhoun, a U.S. vice president who wrote that slavery was not a "necessary evil" but a "positive good." In 2022, Marc spoke to the media about the renaming effort and the importance of truth-telling.

"I think we need to recognize who Calhoun was, but we don't need to honor him in this way," he said.

The following year, the city voted unanimously to rename the square after Susie King Taylor, an educator who was born to enslaved parents in 1848. King accessed her education at the time through clandestine lessons her grandmother arranged.

Patt Gillard Gunn, founder of the Susie King Taylor Center for Jubilee and a local Gullah Geechee tour guide, worked with Marc to rename the square. She still praises his aspirational vision for society.

"Marc began this whole thing," she said. "His encouragement and early insistence that something had to change gave us the drive to endure."

The SPLC is honored to carry forward the work of honoring the fullness of our nation's history and creating fairer, freer and more just public spaces. ●

Scroll of Remembrance

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The SPLC gratefully acknowledges their bequests, received from June 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024.

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Learning for Justice Offers Resources to Resist Hate in Education

From **Staff Reports**

During a time in which many people feel that society is inundated with messages of hate and bias, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Learning for Justice program offers *Resisting Hate in Education*, a series of online resources with strategies to help people engage as a broader community across differences, build networks to foster resilience and take action to resist hate.

"There is no place for hate in justice," Jalaya Liles Dunn, Learning for Justice director. "True justice is rooted in the principles of freedom, liberation and love. The freedom that people can fully live as beings for themselves and not as beings for others. Hate defies justice by ensuring that falsehoods, myths and narrow-focused ideologies are perpetuated through all methods of information to uphold the status quo. Disconnecting populations, particularly young people, from their own realities is fertile ground for manipulation of information to take root for the good of maintaining and preserving the status quo."

The series, at the Learning for Justice website, is rooted in the belief that there is a responsibility to resist hate in society and to foster safer learning spaces for young people — especially those being targeted by hate and discrimination. Cultivating dialogue, engaging with facts and protecting students' right to learn are essential components in strategies for prevention, intervention and response to hate and bias.

A wealth of resources is offered within the collection.

Understanding the connections between race in our history and white supremacist ideologies today is crucial for countering hate in the United States. "History and the Power of Place" includes video interviews with veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, providing first-person accounts of the impact of racism.

"Understanding Antisemitism and Islamophobia" is the first of a two-part resource with explanations of these forms of hate and recommendations for supportive and inclusive learning spaces to counter them.

To access these resources, scan the code or visit LFJ online at lfj.pub/resisting-hate-edu.

Responding to Hate and Bias at School provides guidance for administrators and educators on preventing and navigating a bias- or hate-related crisis at school.

"Protect LGBTQ+ Progress Toward Equality" offers resources for recognizing that LGBTQ+ equality is interconnected with the fundamental rights of all people and is essential in strengthening shared democracy.

Young people who are exposed to hate-filled media often struggle to discern facts and participate responsibly in their schools and communities.

"Prevention and Resilience: Supporting Young People Through Polarizing Times" examines how in a time of political and social turmoil, it is important to build networks of trusted adults to help young people understand, contextualize and counter manipulative content. "Building Resilience Against Manipulative Disinformation" examines how supporting young people's mental health and well-being is essential in addressing vulnerabilities to harmful disinformation.

The issue of online radicalization is addressed by two guides. *Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents and Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization* provides steps to counter the threat of online radicalization, including information on new risks, how to recognize warning signs and how to get help and engage a radicalized child or young adult. Meanwhile, a community perspective is provided by *Building Networks and Addressing Harm: A Community Guide to Online Youth Radicalization*. The guides were released by the SPLC's Intelligence Project and American University's Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab. ●

Report Examines Georgia's School-to-Prison Pipeline

From **Staff Reports**

Racial disparities and systemic failures that disproportionately harm Black children mar Georgia's youth legal system, according to a Southern Poverty Law Center report examining the system.

Released in December, *Only Young Once: Dismantling Georgia's Punitive Youth Incarceration System* examines how Georgia's justice system fails and isolates youth by emphasizing incarceration over support and services. The system's overemphasis on punishment pushes Black children out of traditional schools and promotes the prosecution of children. Georgia is one of the few states in the U.S. that prosecutes 17-year-olds as adults. What's more, it prosecutes children as young as 13 as adults for certain offenses — detaining them in adult facilities.

"This report is a wake-up call," said Delvin Davis, SPLC senior policy analyst and the report's author. "Georgia's youth legal system, which was designed to incarcerate and punish, is not just outdated — its policies are actively harming our young people and communities. The SPLC's *Only Young Once* report presents a clear path forward to creating a system that is fair, effective and focused on rehabilitation."

Only Young Once informs the public about the intent that fuels Georgia's school-to-prison pipeline, which includes zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that ship students to alternative schools, inadequate funding for mental health and support services and racial bias in school discipline. These factors contribute to systemic school pushout, racial disparities in youth incarceration and a cycle of harm that can have long-term effects on Georgia's most vulnerable families.

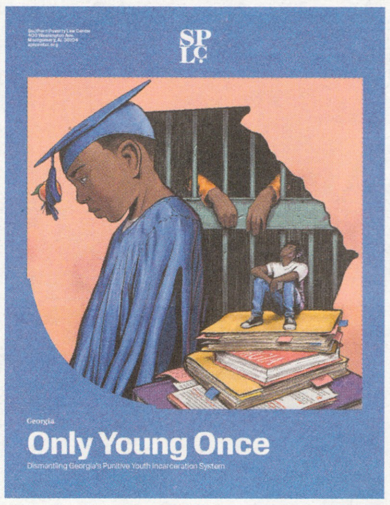
2x

Black youth in Georgia are more than twice as likely to be charged with an offense compared to their white counterparts, and more than three times as likely to be charged in court as an adult.

For example, while Black children in Georgia's schools make up 37.5% of students, they also make up well over half of all out-of-school suspensions, expulsions and assignments to alternative schools. Black youth in Georgia are more than twice as likely to be charged with an offense compared to their white counterparts, and more than three times as likely to be charged in court as an adult.

"In order to disrupt Georgia's school-to-prison pipeline and the impacts of youth incarceration, we also have to adopt reforms and disrupt the culture that keeps punitive measures popular," Davis said. "Otherwise, Georgia's youth prisons will continue to harm generations of Black youth — just as they were designed to do."

Georgia spends $217,517 annually to incarcerate a child in its prison system, only to produce a three-year recidivism rate of 35.1%, according to the report.

"We only get one chance to invest in our young people's futures," Davis said. ●

Scan the code to read the full report and coverage of the SPLC's *Only Young Once* report for Georgia.